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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the shrinking divide between upper and lower division courses and the phenomenon of two-year colleges now being authorized to offer the community college baccalaureate. The author describes the following three educational trends: (1) the upside-down baccalaureate degree, where the order in which students take general education courses and courses in their major is reversed; (2) the emerging role of the community college in teacher education; and (3) the community college baccalaureate. Students in applied associate degree programs aren't always finished with their education. For instance, the author states that in Missouri, 10% of those who received an applied associate's degree transferred to a Missouri public four-year college during the next academic year. The League of Innovation for Community Colleges advocates an upside-down degree for these students so that they will not lose the degree credits they earned in applied fields when they transfer. Articulation agreements for upside-down degrees represent collaboration and cooperation between two-year and four-year colleges. In addition, some states, because of the shortage of K-12 teachers, are moving toward greater involvement of the community college in teacher education. Maryland has recently developed an Associate of Arts in Teacher Education degree. Maryland's 16 community colleges and 22 four-year institutions worked together to develop the program, which allows students to transfer with 15 or more credits toward their majors. (Contains 15 references.) (NB)

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The Shrinking Divide Between Upper and Lower Division Courses: A Baccalaureate Meltdown?[1]

ED 457 922

Newspapers focusing on higher education have recently included headlines like these:

- "Degree will Ease Transfer Burden …"[2]
- "Shortage Prompts Community Colleges to Train, Certify Teachers"[3]
- "The Community College Baccalaureate: Evolution or Self-Delusion?"[4]

The first two headlines indicate two important collaborative efforts between two-year and four-year colleges:

- Efforts to develop an upside down baccalaureate degree where the order in which students take general education courses and courses in their major is reversed.
- Efforts to develop well-articulated teacher education programs in which two-year college students transfer with up to 15 credits in teacher education.

The last headline points to the phenomenon of two-year colleges in at least eight states now being authorized to offer a four-year degree, the community college baccalaureate.

Each of these trends could be seen as shrinking the divide between upper division and lower division courses – a phenomenon that might be described as a baccalaureate meltdown. I will describe this phenomenon in detail by describing the three educational trends already mentioned: (1) the upside down baccalaureate degree, (2) the emerging role of the community college in teacher education, and (3) the community college baccalaureate. As well as indicating the extent to which each of these trends illustrates cooperation or competition between the two-year and four-year sectors, I will also explain why some people are critical of these trends. I will conclude by examining these trends in terms of the four values that dominate the making of American educational policy.

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[1] Invited speech at Phil Hardin Leadership Symposium, Annual Mississippi Association of Colleges and Universities Conference, Gulf Port, MS, October 16-16, 2001.
[2] July 24, 2001, *Community College Times*, p. 7.
[3] August 20, 2001, *Community College Week*, p. 18
[4] July 23, 2001, *Community College Week*, p. 1.

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The "Upside Down" Degree

Currently more community college students graduate with the applied or terminal degree, than with the transfer or Associate of Arts (A.A.) degree. However, not all applied associate degree recipients want to terminate their education after receiving their degree. Rather, some seek to transfer to a four-year college and receive a baccalaureate degree. For example, in Missouri, of those who received an applied associate degree during 1995-96, almost 10% transferred to a Missouri public four-year college during the next academic year as compared to 41% of those who received the A.A. degree (Townsend & Barnes, 2001). Although applied degree recipients have been transferring for many decades, it is only recently that researchers and policy makers have begun to pay attention to this phenomenon (Townsend, in press).

When students in applied associate degree programs decide they want to transfer to four-year colleges, they often find that most of their degree credits won't transfer. Why? Because, unlike the transfer associate degree, an applied degree program consists primarily of courses in an applied field or major such as criminal justice, drafting, electronics, food services, information systems technology, or nursing. Many four-year college only have upper-level or junior/senior courses in these areas and decline to accept two-year college courses, considered lower division or freshman/sophomore levels, in lieu of upper division courses in the major.

Whereas the transfer associate degree is almost entirely general education courses, the applied associate degree requires very few general education courses. Therefore, applied degree recipients need to take general education courses to complete the bachelor's degree.

To increase the transfer of applied associate degree recipients and to lessen the number of credits lost upon transfer to a baccalaureate institution, the League of Innovation for Community Colleges is currently advocating an "upside down degree"(League for Innovation Announces Articulation Agreements, 2001). In this baccalaureate degree "the normal order of beginning with general college requirements [general education] and finishing with studies in a specialized academic area in order to complete a four-year bachelor's degree is reversed" (Whitworth Continuing Studies, 2001). The two-year college courses in the applied major count toward much of the four-year college major and most of the general education courses needed for the baccalaureate are taken at the four-year college. Some of the general education courses may even be taken at the community college after the applied associate degree has been completed and then transferred in as additional course credits.

DeVry Institute, a well known chain of for-profit colleges, offers an example of this approach. DeVry has created a bachelor of science in technical management. "Loaded heavily with required courses in communications, humanities, and business, the degree is

designed to balance the more technical course load the students receive in getting their associate's degree" (Blumenstyk, 2000).

Within its Bachelor of Liberal Studies, Whitworth College, a private, non-profit college in the state of Washington, has developed an "'upside-down' degree option for community college A.A.S. degree holders." A student selecting this option "may choose simply to complete Whitworth's general requirements, upper-division courses and total credits needed for a liberal studies degree with no major specified …since the student has already completed a concentrated area of study" (Whitworth Continuing Studies, 2001).

Several colleges in Missouri have developed articulation agreements to facilitate students' attaining an upside down degree. For example, Northwest Missouri State University has an articulation agreement with Metropolitan Area Community Colleges for a Bachelor of Science in Business. Under this articulation agreement, students who have an Associate of Applied Science (A.A.S.) in General Business can transfer up to 84 credits: the 63 hours needed for the A.A.S. and 21 additional hours in general education courses. Since the total hours needed for the baccalaureate is 124, the transfer students may only need to take 40 hours or about one and one-half years of courses at the senior institution (DeYoung, 2001). In other words, they can transfer credits equivalent to the first 2 and ½ years of college.

Articulation agreements for upside down degrees represent great collaboration and cooperation between two-year and four-year colleges. Upside down degrees will likely result in increased numbers of people attaining the baccalaureate degree. However, for some people, the concept of an upside down degree is troubling because it represents a blurring of the lines between upper division and lower division courses. For most of the 20th century, the baccalaureate has consisted of lower division general education courses, upper division courses in the major, and electives. General education courses are usually designed as introductions to the various disciplines, with students then choosing one of these disciplines as their major (Alexander, 1993). Courses in one's major are usually upper division courses to be taken in the junior and senior years of college. In theory, courses in the major build upon the skills learned in general education courses. In other words, general education provides a broad foundation of knowledge, and the major builds upon this foundation. In upside down baccalaureate degree programs, students with applied associate degrees take much of their major at the two-year college and the bulk of their general education courses at the four-year college. Thus the community college transfers are taking as juniors and seniors lower division general education courses (freshman and sophomore-level courses). In other words, the major does not rest upon the foundation of general education but rather general education overlays the major. An upside down degree clearly equals four years of college-level work and credits. What is less clear is whether the degree equals four years of progressively difficult college-level work where the courses build upon one another sequentially.

The upside down degree represents one kind of collaborative effort between two-year and four-year colleges. Another collaborative effort being undertaken in some states is an

increased role for community colleges in teacher education, even to the point of offering an Associate of Arts in Teaching.

The Emerging Role of the Community College in Teacher Education

Prompted by the scarcity of K-12 teachers, some states are moving toward greater involvement of the community college in teacher education. Historically, state coordination of the community college role in teacher education has been minimal (Moore, 2002). Rather, individual institutions have developed articulation agreements for their teacher education programs. However, developing these agreements can be problematic. Many four-year colleges have a teacher education program that does not start until the junior year. These colleges do not want to count any community college courses as courses in the major because the community college courses are lower-level courses (freshman or sophomore level) and the four-year college's teacher education program consists of upper division level courses. When the Missouri Teacher Education Articulation Advisory Committee sought to "identify problems and concerns … affect[ing] students' ability to transfer" (Final Report, 2001) in teacher education programs, it found that several four-year colleges had teacher education programs that did not begin until the junior or even senior year of college. Institutions with such programs are not likely to perceive a need for articulation agreements with two-year teacher education programs nor support the idea of an Associate of Arts in Teacher Education degree.

Maryland has recently developed such a degree, partly because of state encouragement for an increased community college role in teacher education. With the support of the Maryland State Department of Education and the Maryland Higher Education Commission, Maryland's 16 community colleges and the 22 four-year institutions with teacher education programs worked together to develop an Associate of Arts degree in Teacher Education (Maureen McDonough, private correspondence, October 9, 2001). As of Fall 2001, all students who complete the A.A. in Teacher Education degree with a Grade Point Average of 2.75 or higher and pass the Praxis I exam[5] can enter a Maryland four-year college with 15 or more credits toward their major in teacher education (Shek, 2001).

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[5] "The state-mandated assessment for teacher certification" (Shek, 2001, p. 7).

Not all four-year colleges in other states may be supportive of this approach because it means students start a teacher education program before the junior year of college and thus have lower division courses in the major. Institutions where the teacher education program begins in the junior or senior year may perceive that lower division credits are now being counted as upper division courses. Also, some faculty prefer starting their teacher education program in the junior or senior year because the four-year college is the institution ultimately responsible to the state and to NCATE[6] for the quality of its teacher education graduates (The Community College Role in Preparing Tomorrow's Teachers, 2000). Therefore, they don't want to accept another institution's courses in the program.

What is the role of community colleges in teacher education in Mississippi? According to a 2000 policy brief authored by Walter Moore, a survey of Mississippi community college presidents indicated that the presidents "have accepted the general rule in Mississippi that teacher education occurs during the students' junior and senior years at a four-year teacher education institution" (p. 5). Thus I assume that Mississippi is a state with few two-year college/four-year college teacher education articulation agreements. However, I see by the MACJC (Missouri Association of Community and Junior Colleges) Teacher Preparation Initiative report (2001) that at least some people in Mississippi want two-year colleges to be more involved in teacher preparation, and it will be interesting to see what involvement occurs.

In addition to offering an associate degree in teacher education, another way community colleges are becoming more involved in teacher education is though offering a community college baccalaureate degree in education. This trend could also be viewed as one more way in which two-year college courses are counting as upper division courses.

The Community College Baccalaureate Degree

The phenomenon of public two-year colleges offering baccalaureate degrees is escalating. Community colleges in at least eight states have been authorized to offer a baccalaureate in addition to their other degrees. These states include Arkansas, Florida, Hawaii, Nevada, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Utah (Walker, 2001). For example, Great Basin College in Nevada offers a Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education and two other bachelor degrees as well as its associate degree. To offer these degrees, some community colleges are morphing into four-year colleges. For example, St. Petersburg Junior College in Florida became St. Petersburg College in June of this year and is now authorized to offer baccalaureate degrees in elementary, special, and secondary education as well as nursing (Manzo, 2001). However, the Florida legislation authorizing these degrees states that St. Petersburg "'is still a part of the Florida Community College system [and] is primarily a community college by mission'" (Manzo, 2001).

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[6] Should the college be accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education.

Other community colleges offer a baccalaureate in conjunction with universities through establishing university centers, "formal collaborations with four-year institutions based on two-year campuses" (Manzo, 2001, p. 7). College of Lake County in Illinois plans to offer a baccalaureate in education through a collaboration with a local university.

In saying the community college baccalaureate illustrates the shrinking divide between lower and upper division courses, I'm stretching to make my point. In the case of the community college baccalaureate, the community college has been authorized to offer upper division (junior and senior level) courses, so lower division courses are not really counting as upper division courses. However, I am including this trend because those who object to it do so for similar reasons they object to upside down degrees and potentially object to greater involvement of the community college in teacher education.

Those who oppose the community college baccalaureate do so for several reasons. Perhaps the greatest fear is that community colleges will neglect their traditional missions to focus on baccalaureate programs. For example, community colleges may have to divert some of their resources to meet the accreditation standards for four-year education and nursing programs (Major Challenges, 2001). Another concern is that the degree "'would always be know as a second-class bachelor's'" (Manzo, 2001, p. 8) because community colleges weren't designed to offer baccalaureates and lack the faculty and staff expertise to do so. Others argue that "the nature of the baccalaureate degree itself is on the table – is it a sum of courses, or something more?" (Healey, 1998). This concern, which some also hold for the upside down degree, seems motivated by the perspective that a baccalaureate degree is "a socializing experience, in which you develop methods to understand values and learning" as opposed to "practical training" (Healey, 1998).

Another concern about the community college baccalaureate is that it did not develop because of cooperation and collaboration between two-year and four-year colleges. Rather, the exact opposite. St. Petersburg College leaders claim the College needs to offer baccalaureates because area universities don't offer programs that meet area residents' "needs for flexible scheduling and affordable tuition" (Manzo, 2001, p. 7). Also, area universities "have not responded to companies' needs for flexible training programs, particularly in key shortage areas such as education, health care and information technology" (pp. 7-8). Therefore, the community college had to respond to area residents' needs since the universities wouldn't. This pitting of sectors against each other is the exact opposite of what happened with the A.A. in Teacher Education and the upside down degree.

Ways to View These Trends

How do we view these developments? We could view the upside down degree and the A.A. in Teacher Education as superb examples of collaboration between two-year and four-year colleges to increase the number of community college graduates who earn a baccalaureate, particularly in teacher education. Similarly the community college baccalaureate could also be viewed as achieving this goal. Alternatively, we could view

these developments as a baccalaureate meltdown, whereby the baccalaureate becomes nothing more than a collection of courses that total up to the number of credits required to receive a degree.

What values might make us hold one perspective or another? According to Marshall, Frederick, and Wirt (1989), four cultural or social values shape United States educational policy: choice, quality, efficiency, and equity. The value of *choice*, or the freedom to choose, is illustrated by students' right to choose to go to college and to choose among colleges and among programs. Choice is also illustrated by institutions choosing which students to admit and to what programs, and to choose which degrees, programs, and courses to offer. The value of *quality*, or excellence, is illustrated by institutions seeking to have the best students, faculty, and programs. *Efficiency* means keeping costs down and productivity up, programmatically, institutionally, and systemically. The final value of *equity* or access to equivalent opportunities means there should be no limitations to college attendance because of one's financial situation, geographic location, previous academic record, or physical condition.

These values both compliment and conflict with one another when educational policies are formulated. For example, emphasizing *efficiency* may come at the expense of *quality*, if quality translates into higher salaries to attract star faculty or more money for library resources. *Equity* and *choice* may complement one another in the development of financial aid policies that enable more people to choose to attend college, including private colleges.

The values of *equity*, *efficiency*, and *choice* seem apparent in the development of the upside down degree, a greater role for the community college in teacher education, and the community college baccalaureate. The value of *quality* probably dominates the opposition to these trends, although concerns about efficiency lie behind some criticisms of the community college baccalaureate. Perceptions of *quality* reflect one's personal assumptions about what a college education should be. Those who believe a "narrowly vocational … [curriculum] that is skills-oriented, specialized, and job-related" (Chickering, Halliburton, Bergquist, & Lindquist, 1977, p.81) is not collegiate-level education will probably be opposed to the community college baccalaureate. For that matter, they would probably oppose a baccalaureate in education and therefore an A.A. in Teacher Education. They should support an upside down degree in that it does require general education courses although not in the order traditionalists would endorse or prefer.

In closing, I ask of you: What is your perspective? Do the educational trends I've presented today represent a baccalaureate meltdown or do they represent an evolution in the development of new ways for students to achieve the baccalaureate?

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